

# **Professor the Lord David Alton of Liverpool**

**Member, House of Lords**

**Co-founder, Jubilee Campaign**

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**House Committee on International Relations**

## **Testimony on Global Plight of Street Children**

### **Introduction & Present Reality:**

Good afternoon.

Jubilee Campaign has been lobbying to protect children's rights for over 10 years. Jubilee Campaign's advocacy has stood alongside the direct and practical support provided by Campaign's sister organisation, Jubilee Action.

Street Children are not a recent phenomenon. Whenever there has been a major social, political or economic crisis the existence of Street Children has been prevalent.

Estimates for children living in the streets include:

Brazil – 200,000 to 8 million

India – over 400,000 in the cities alone

The Philippines – 1.5 million

In the early 1990's Jubilee Campaign was one of the first UK groups to sound the killing of street children on the streets of Brazil.

Working with journalists John Downing and Danny McGrory we exposed the reality of police death squads – making front page news in the Daily Express, a National UK daily paper.

Many well-known figures including Paul McCartney, George and Olivia Harrison, Richard Branson and Imran Khan have supported the campaign.

A defining moment was when the issue of street children was put on the agenda by John Major during his visit to Rio for the 1992 Earth Summit.

During this period, Jubilee gathered shocking evidence of police death squads routinely shooting children on the streets to clear them off the streets.

I visited to Brazil, in February 2004, hoping to discover the situation had changed.

We began our mission by making a quiet pilgrimage to the church of Our Lady of Candelaria, in Rio.

It was here, in July 1993 that six police officers opened fire on a group of street children who were sleeping in some doorways opposite the church.

Today, a small cross, with the names of the eight boys who died, has been erected in front of Candelaria. Their silhouettes have been etched in red onto the surface of the street.

Our investigation found that the killing of street children in Brazil continues - at an alarming rate. The only perceivable change since 1990s is a redistribution of where the killings are taking place.

The police no longer shoot children in public –they have learnt that bad publicity is not good for tourism.

Hidden away in the sprawling favelas of Brazil's major cities, children are on the front-line of an urban war between rival drug gangs.

*An expert from Brazil's National Movement of Street Children says that between 4 and 5 adolescents are murdered daily; that every 12 minutes a child is beaten; that 4.5 million children under 12 are working; and that 500,000 children are engaged in domestic labour. In 40% of crimes children are the victims.*

The massive proliferation of small arms is a central cause. One of the movement's activists told me, 'It is easier for a child to get a gun than to get a bus-pass.'

Alongside the greater accessibility to guns, what has changed since the 1990's and deepened the crisis, is the emergence of a ruinous drugs culture. Formerly, Brazil was simply a transit country for the notorious producers of Columbia, Bolivia and Peru.

Today, Brazil ranks only after the USA as the second biggest consumer of cocaine. In Rio's 680 favelas – where about 25% of the city's 12 million people live – this has led to the emergence of no-go areas controlled by rival gangs such as Red Command and Third Command, who organize and arm the children.

Children as young as four have guns and are used as 'little planes' – to use the jargon of the street- trafficking drugs and messages between sellers and buyers.

I was struck by the remark of one youngster in the favela who told me that, "The only way to go up in society is to go through the trafficking of guns or drugs."

The role models are young men with designer clothes and brand new motorbikes. They earn phenomenally more through the drugs trade than their fathers. But, if they come to represent the only ladder on which the young can climb out of destitution, Lula will end up presiding over a dead country. It is impossible to reconcile rhetoric about social justice and opportunity with the reality of corpses lying like litter in the streets.

During our visit, we went to Santo Amaro which is situated in North East Brazil on the edge of one of Recife's biggest favelas and is the most violent area in the city. Last year, sixteen young people were shot, or died, as a result of either non-payment to pushers or from overdoses. The youngest urchin was ten years old.

One of the workers at Santo Amaro, has seen his three brothers killed and the young woman who trains the dancers recently saw her brother gunned down.

Tellingly, she demanded to know why firearms should be freely available: “Children who can’t even get food to eat can get a gun. 74% of the killings are by gun. I never saw a gun in my life and now they are everywhere.” She described how two more young people, aged 20 and 21, who passed through their centre, had been killed in the previous week. One was another case of mistaken identity: “They took him from his mother’s arms and killed him.” The other had been a drug user who hadn’t paid his bill.

She wanted to know where the international pressure to end the bloodbath was. Pointedly, she said that, “While the killers are free, it is society that is in prison.

Her son died just one year ago and unlike most people, who are cowed into silence by a fear of brutal retaliation, the people of Peixinhos rallied to support her as she organized a public procession of crosses and candles. *In all, there were eighty crosses – each bearing the name of men, women and children who had been killed over the previous two years. Repeat: eighty people from one small community in just two years.*

This situation, however, is not restricted to Brazil.

### **Street Children—a Global Overview:**

Street Children across the world may be homeless, work on the streets, have no contact with their families, live on the streets with their families, live in day or night shelters or spend time in institutions, for example prison.

There are no confirmed figures of Street Children, they are not easy to count due to migration, exclusion from infrastructures such as schools and colleges and due to differing definitions of the term Street Children. Figures for these children are estimates and can often be wildly exaggerated. Most statistics are simply estimates for example:

|             |            |
|-------------|------------|
| Kenya:      | 250,000    |
| Ethiopia:   | 150,000    |
| Zimbabwe:   | 2,000      |
| Bangladesh: | 445,226    |
| Nepal:      | 30,000     |
| India:      | 11 million |

Whilst these figures are estimates, there is anecdotal evidence that these figures are increasing country by country due to the following:

- Uncontrollable urbanisation – directly linked to poverty
- Conflict within family
- Conflict with the law
- Children being orphaned due to AIDS/HIV

### **Street Children in Conflict with the Law – Philippines & Congo:**

Vagrancy is in some countries an offence, and the police round these children up from the streets and through them into prison. Other children are accused of petty crimes and imprisoned, often without having a first hearing, in overcrowded adult jails where they are at the mercy of the prison guards and fellow prisoners.

UNICEF estimated in 2001 that there were 1 million children illegally imprisoned in jails across the world. The proportion of juvenile detainees to adult prisoners varies from country to country from 0.5-30% of the total prison population.

Jubilee Action, a children's human rights charity from Guildford, UK has released a report detailing this horrendous situation, and took an ITN camera crew to the Philippines to document the reality of child prisoners. This report was subsequently shown on Broadcast Networks worldwide, including CNN.

In the Philippines there are estimated to be 20,000 children imprisoned in conditions that amount to torture. Children as young as 9 can be tried in courts and sent to jails, some children have been found in jail younger than 9, like Rosie aged 6.

Children imprisoned with adults are:

5 times more likely to be sexually assaulted

Twice as likely to be beaten

And 50% more likely to be attacked with a weapon, than children housed in juvenile detention centres.

Further original research was undertaken within the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

UNICEF estimates that 30,000 children under the age of 12 are under-arms and this makes up 10% of the armed groups in the region. 20,000 children are believed to live on the streets in the DRC capital, Kinshasa, and of the children imprisoned in the Central Prison of Makala, all them were found to be in an acutely traumatised state.

### **Stop Killing Children Web Site:**

In September 2004 Jubilee Campaign launched the Stop Killing Children website because we believe that it is unacceptable for any country to allow the routine killing of children without redress.

When children like Danielle Becham in are killed in the UK, this tragedy is rightly front page news. In places like Brazil where violence against children is common place, the lives of children who are killed are easily forgotten.

The website will also report cases from countries such as Guatemala, the Philippines and Honduras . However, starting with Brazil, this web-site has two aims;

1. In the absence of a grave stone for many of these children, this site will document the deaths of children killed through armed violence. This site will be a memorial and a reminder that their lives are not forgotten.
2. To be a tool in order to leverage political pressure on the relevant authorities to take effective action to prevent the killing of children through armed violence. The website has letters to be downloaded to the Brazilian President and a petition to sign because we believe the Brazilian Government is susceptible to political pressure.

The number of reported cases on this website has now exceeded 750 in a single year.

I want to end my statement by giving some examples of these cases we have already compiled of children and young people whose lives have been needlessly cut short.

**May 09, 2005**

6 month old girl raped and killed

*A six-month-old girl was raped and killed on Saturday around midday at home in the locality of Sítio Extrema, in the municipality of Icó (Ceará). Reportedly, the crime was committed by the victim's uncle whilst her parents were out of home. The alleged killer is in police custody.*

**Jun 14, 2005**

2 year old boy shot dead by his cousin.

*Reportedly, the victim's 13-year-old cousin showed his father's gun to an 11-year-old cousin and the child was near them. According to the 11-year-old boy, the teenager said that he would shoot him and he decided to take the child back home. As they turned back, the 13-year-old boy shot the victim.*

**Aug 09, 2005**

8 year old boy found dead cut in pieces

*Eight-year-old boy was found dead inside a pack cut in pieces yesterday afternoon in the district of Vila Bahia, in the municipality of Encruzilhada (Bahia). Reportedly, the boy was last seen on Sunday afternoon. Confessed killer Zenilton Barbosa dos Santos, 28, said he committed the crime because the victim has offended him. The crime is under investigation.*

**Aug 18, 2005**

Three children found dead on Tuesday afternoon.

*Reportedly, the victims, two aged 8 one of them aged 7, were last seen on Monday afternoon and were found in different places along the Almada river, 15 km far from the downtown of the municipality. According to the police, the victims, two girls and a boy, were strangled.*

Thank you.

[ENDS]